

Teenage Drivers Carry Extra Risks

Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

In the United States, teenagers drive less than all but the oldest people, but their numbers of crashes and crash deaths are disproportionately high. In the United States, the fatal crash rate per mile driven for 16-19 year-olds is nearly 3 times the rate for drivers ages 20 and over. Risk is highest at ages 16-17. In fact, the fatal crash rate per mile driven is nearly twice as high for 16-17 year-olds as it is for 18-19 year-olds.

Beginning in the mid 1990s, all states have adopted graduated licensing systems, which phase in full driving privileges. In states that adopted elements of graduated licensing, the crash rates among teenage drivers declined about 10-30 percent. National studies of graduated licensing found that strong laws were associated with substantially lower fatal crash rates and substantially lower insurance claim rates among young teen drivers covered by the laws. Strong restrictions on nighttime driving and teen passengers, as well as raising the licensing age, reduced rates of fatal crashes and insurance collision claims

Teen Vehicle Crashes

Teen drivers have crash rates 3 times those of drivers 20 and older per mile driven. Immaturity leads to speeding and other risky habits, and inexperience means teen drivers often don't recognize or know how to respond to hazards.

In 2011, 3,023 teenagers (ages 13-19) died in the United States from crash injuries. Such injuries are by far the leading cause of death among people 13-19 years old. The crash risk among teenage drivers is particularly high during the first months of licensure.

Eighty percent of teenagers killed in crashes in 2011 were passenger vehicle occupants. The others were pedestrians (10 percent), motorcyclists (5 percent), bicyclists (2 percent), riders of all-terrain vehicles (2 percent), and people in other kinds of vehicles (2 percent). Fifty-four percent of the teenagers who died in passenger vehicles were drivers and 46 percent were passengers. Fifty-nine percent of the teenage passenger deaths occurred in vehicles driven by another teenager.

Fatal crashes of teenage drivers are more likely to be attributed to driver error compared with the crashes of adults ages 30-59. Teenagers' fatal crashes also are more likely to involve speeding and to be single-vehicle crashes. Teenagers do more of their driving at night than other drivers, and their rate of fatal nighttime crash involvements is higher than the rate for adults age 30-59 (12 vs. 4 crashes per 100 millions miles driven). A review of research on the effects of passengers found consistent evidence that the presence of passengers increases crash risk among teenage drivers but decreases crash risk among drivers ages 30 and older.

Young drivers tend to overestimate their own driving abilities and, at the same time, underestimate the dangers on the road. An Institute research review confirmed that driver age and experience both have strong effects on driver crash risk. Crash rates for young drivers are high largely because of their immaturity combined with driving inexperience. The immaturity is apparent in young drivers' risky driving practices such as speeding. At the same time,

teenagers' lack of experience behind the wheel makes it difficult for them to recognize and respond to hazards. They get in trouble trying to handle unusual driving situations, and these situations turn disastrous more often than when older people drive.

The number of teenagers (ages 13-19) who died in motor vehicle crashes was 8,748 in 1975 and 3,023 in 2011, a decline of 65 percent. Between 1996, when the first three-stage graduated driver licensing program was implemented in the United States, and 2011, teenage crash deaths declined by 48 percent (from 5,819 to 3,023).

Teenage driver crash involvements per population also have declined since 1996, and the largest declines occurred for 16 year-olds. Between 1996 and 2011 fatal crashes per population fell 72 percent for 16 year-olds, 62 percent for 17 year-olds, 58 percent for 18 year-olds, and 45 percent for 19 year-olds. During the same period, police-reported crashes per population fell 66 percent for 16 year-olds, 53 percent for 17 year-olds, 42 percent for 18 year-olds, and 36 percent for 19 year-olds.

Graduated Licensing

Graduated licensing reduces teens' driving risk. Graduated licensing allows teens to practice driving with supervision before getting their license and restricts driving after they are licensed. Today all states have at least some elements of graduated licensing. The current best practices are a minimum intermediate license age of 17, a minimum permit age of 16, at least 65 required hours of supervised practice driving, and, during the intermediate stage, a night driving restriction starting at 8 p.m. and a ban on all teen passengers.

Teenage drivers have the highest crash risk per mile traveled, compared with drivers in other age groups. Young drivers tend to overestimate their driving abilities and underestimate the dangers on the road. Graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws reduce this risk by making sure teens gradually build up driving experience under lower-risk conditions as they mature and develop skills. That means limiting nighttime driving, restricting teen passengers and making sure teens get lots of supervised practice. Graduated licensing has reduced teen crashes 10-30 percent on average.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have a three-stage GDL system. The United States doesn't have a national GDL law. State lawmakers decide what provisions to adopt and how to enforce them. Institute research has show that states with the strongest laws enjoy bigger reductions in teen driver deaths than states with weak laws. Some states make teens wait a little longer before they get their learner permits and full-privilege licenses. This also saves lives.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a factor in many teen crashes. Among teen drivers killed in 2010, 30 percent of males and 22 percent of females had blood alcohol concentrations of 0.08 percent or higher. Although young drivers are less likely than adults to drink and drive, their crash risk is higher when they do. The combination of drinking and driving is made worse by teenagers' relative inexperience both with drinking and with driving.

The most effective policies address crash risk factors (e.g., night driving and passenger restrictions) or limit teenagers' driving exposure (e.g., higher ages for initial licensure). Graduated licensing, designed to provide beginning drivers with an opportunity to gain experience behind the wheel under conditions that minimize risk, was introduced in New Zealand in 1987. All U.S. states have introduced elements of graduated licensing. Evaluations of graduated licensing systems in U.S. states and Canadian provinces have shown they reduce crashes substantially. A pair of national studies by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the Highway Loss Data Institute found that strong restrictions on nighttime driving and teenage passengers, as well as delayed licensing age, reduce fatal crashes and insurance losses for teenage drivers. In addition, the studies found that delaying permit age reduces fatal crashes and that increasing practice hours reduces insurance losses. This research helped guide the Institute and Highway Loss Data Institute in developing an online calculator to show the safety gains individual states could achieve by adopting some or all of the most beneficial graduated licensing provisions in effect today.

----- QUESTIONS -----

1. What is the main idea of this article?

2. What are the most effective policies to address crashes?

3. What were 2 things in this article you agree with?

1. _____

2. _____

4. What were 2 things in this article you're not sure you agree with?

1. _____

2. _____

5. Summarize this article by stating three specific details that are important to the overall theme:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

